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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1553
INFO RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1472
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 0647
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 0642
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0418
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0424
RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON 0276
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0072
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0343
RUEILB/NCTC WASHINGTON DC
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDHP/DIA DHP-1 WASHINGTON DC
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KOLKATA 000166

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SUBJECT: TERRORIST GROUP UNITED LIBERATION FRONT OF ASOM KILLS
"INDIAN OUTSIDERS" IN UPPER ASSAM

REF: KOLKATA 00149

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On May 16, ethnic Assamese terrorist group United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) gunned down three Hindi-speaking market traders in two different incidents in Golaghat district in Upper Assam. These attacks came soon after ULFA's killing on the previous day, May 15, of six Hindi-speaking "outsiders" in the Northeast Indian state of Assam. The killings in Upper Assam followed threats by ULFA's 28th Battalion "Charlie" Company Commander to local media on May 14 that ULFA would kill "Indians" living in Assam and would "award capital punishment" to those who attacked demonstrators and Ulfa-sympathizers blocking National Highway 37 to protest the Indian Army's killing on May 5 of a suspected ULFA insurgent. On May 14, ULFA triggered a bomb blast in the state capital Guwahati, killing two persons. ULFA's steady campaign of violence, especially against perceived outsiders, is unlikely to abate soon. Neither the GOI nor ULFA appear ready to discuss peace and ULFA's persistent small scale attacks against defenseless civilians in remote areas of the state require little resources or risk for the terrorist group. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On May 16, four suspected ULFA insurgents drove motorcycles into a market in Golaghat district in Upper Assam and shot to death two local traders, Dipak Agarwal and Tankeswar Chahu, identified as non-Assamese "Hindi-speaking outsiders." Later, in the town of Merapani on the Nagaland border local businessman Srinath Jaiswal was also shot dead.

¶3. (U) These three deaths came soon after the killing of six other non-Assamese Hindi-speakers in the evening of May 15. Suspected ULFA members shot dead the "outsiders" in two separate incidents in Dibrugarh and Sivasagar districts of Upper Assam. The militants sprayed bullets from automatic weapons at a small shop in Borhat, Sivsagar, killing its owner and injuring his son. In Dibrugarh, five persons were shot when ULFA militants attacked Belbari village. These latest incidents are similar to the attacks in January 5-16 when ULFA gunned down as many as 63 Hindi-speaking people in the Upper Assam region.

¶4. (U) The attacks follow threats by ULFA's 28th Battalion Charlie Company Commander Jiten Dutta that he made in calls to local newspapers on May 14. Dutta said that ULFA would conduct attacks on "Indian people living in the state." (Comment:

ULFA, an Other Selected Terrorist Organization (OSTO), claims to be fighting for Assamese ethnic identity and an independent Assam and sees migrants from other parts of India as "outsiders." However, ULFA has refrained from attacking the larger community of illegal Bangladeshi migrants that arguably represent a greater threat to Assamese ethnic identity in Assam. This noticeable absence of threat to Bangladeshis appears to support GOI claims that ULFA retains good relations with the Bangladesh government. End Comment.) ULFA Chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa has also held the government responsible for inciting tea plantation laborers in Upper Assam to attack villagers near Doomdooma in Tinsukia district. On May 13, armed tea plantation laborers clashed with protesters and ULFA sympathizers who blocked two vital national highways to protest the killing of Buddheswar Moran during the army's anti-insurgency operations on May 5. The situation spiraled out of control, and six persons died in the confrontation between the two groups.

¶5. (U) On May 14, the ULFA triggered a powerful blast in the busy Athgaon area of Guwahati. The blast killed two and injured nine persons. The bomb, suspected to be an Improvised Explosive Device (IED), was planted on a motorcycle. Police claimed that the bomb was planted by Aboni Das alias Rakhtim alias Ranjan, an ULFA cadre who died from explosive shrapnel. Enraged local residents and businessmen protested this attack as yet another security lapse on the part of police. Earlier on May 6, ULFA had exploded a bomb concealed in a motorcycle in the busy Fancy Bazaar area, near Athgaon, injuring 19 people (Reftel).

¶6. (SBU) An Assam police official told Post that the ULFA is no longer capable of a full-scale "war" and therefore is resorting to small explosions and attacks, seeking to encourage its supporters in Upper Assam. He observed that peace talks with ULFA are unlikely as at present there is little pressure on the outfit from either GOI or Bangladesh. The outfit's extortion

KOLKATA 00000166 002 OF 002

drive is intense and its violence is often to intimidate those who have not paid. Also, ULFA's support base is confined to Upper Assam, where the May 5 killing of a Moran generated public outrage. The recent violence is likely retaliation for the incident.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: ULFA's targeting of defenseless "Hindi-speakers" in remote areas of Assam, far from the protection of authorities, is an easy and low risk way to sustain pressure on the GOI to restrain the security forces and to rally supporters with tangible evidence of ULFA's ability to attack at will. Neither ULFA nor the GOI appear ready to begin peace negotiations and the violence will likely continue with a steady series of IED bombings and killings of Hindi-speaking "outsiders."
JARDINE